



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE
BELFAST MONTHLY MAGAZINE.

No. 42.]

JANUARY 31, 1812.

[Vol. 8.]

COMMUNICATIONS, ORIGINAL AND SELECTED.

For the Belfast Monthly Magazine.

ON THE POSTHUMOUS RESTRICTIONS
LAID BY HUSBANDS ON THEIR WIDOWS.

"When on the awful bed of death reclin'd,
Think on the faithful fair you leave behind;
Those charms that could thy heart with rapture fill,

Those kind attentions more endearing still,
That loveliness of mind; to which was due,

All that of earthly bliss you ever knew;
Ah! recollect, nor prove to them unjust,
Swayed by ungrateful friend or mean distrust."

McERIN.

I was the other day, called to write the last will of a man turned of seventy, who, from a severe attack of the gout, supposed his presence in the other world would very shortly be required.

He had lived the unsocial life of a bachelor until the age of fifty, when he married a beautiful young girl, just entering into one and twenty. He was a man of very engaging manners and agreeable dispositions, and as the marriage had been wholly her own choice, his young wife had invariably appeared to possess more real affection for him, than considering the disparity of their ages, could have been reasonably expected.

For his part, he was dotingly fond of her. Her will was the sole rule of his conduct; and in ordinary conversation, her name, actions, and opinions furnished him with, at least, one third of what he had to say. She

had been rendered still dearer to him by the birth of five children, only one of whom however, was at present alive; and if the assurances of love and attachment, her whole conduct had hitherto given him, could have admitted of any addition, they would have received it from the unfeigned distress with which his present illness had overwhelmed her. My knowledge of his extreme fondness for his wife, and the harmony in which they lived, led me naturally to suppose, that after a competent provision for his surviving daughter, the remainder of his very considerable property would be left under the direction of her, to whom he owed all the real happiness he ever enjoyed. It is not easy then to conceive my surprise and disappointment when ordered to set down a moderate portion for his child; a small annuity to his wife, to continue only during her widowhood, and to divide the remainder into legacies among distant relations, who had treated him very badly on the occasion of his marriage, and with whom from that time till the commencement of his present illness, he had not held the slightest intercourse. I could not avoid informing him how far his arrangement differed from my expectations, and observing that those relations, from their conduct to him during his life, appeared to me but ill entitled to such remembrance at his death. That he acknowledged, had once been his own opinion, but it now,

he said, become him to forget injuries, and added he, however they may have behaved, they are still *my own relations*.

My remonstrance, however, so far succeeded, that he was prevailed upon to augment considerably the fortune of his daughter; but, with regard to the widow, I could not persuade him, to make the slightest alteration. He acknowledged himself more indebted to her than to all his relations put together; and declared there was nothing he would not do to secure her happiness. But, said he, "I know from experience, that the dead are usually forgotten: and, notwithstanding my very high sense of her prudence and attachment to me, I am apprehensive, if left in affluence, she might be prevailed upon to take a second husband." You might at all events make the annuity during her widowhood more considerable, "That is," said he, "what I very much wish, but dare not do. She will I know, live free of expense with her daughter, at least during her minority, and were I to augment her annuity, it might in that time, so accumulate as to be an inducement to her *second marriage*:" "which is," said he, with earnestness, "what I by all means wish to prevent." And why, said I, if she finds it for her comfort or happiness, should you wish to prevent her from taking another husband? "What!" said he, with a warmth of eagerness, which his weak state of health could but ill support "do you suppose I could bear the thought, of her becoming the wife of another man, and of him, through that means enjoying any part of my property!" He seemed about to add some vehement exclamation expressive of aversion and abhorrence, when the exertion he had already made, being too much for his strength,

brought on a most violent paroxysm of the disorder, and for some hours, I supposed the affair of his testament wholly at an end. He recovered, however, so far as to be able to hear and acknowledge as his will, the distribution of his property which he had before directed, and upon which I did not think it prudent to propose any further alterations. In the course of about an hour afterwards, he in another paroxysm, resigned all interest in wife, property, and the world at large.

When the family had a little recovered from the shock of this sudden, and in some measure unexpected event, I left them and returned home, moralizing all the way upon what had happened. I could not avoid execrating in my own mind, the avaricious folly of those young girls who throw away the best part of their lives by marrying *old dotards*, whose selfishness in general, surpasses, if possible, even their insensibility: and who not satisfied with depriving their young victims of every enjoyment deserving the name during their lives, wish even after death, to continue their tyranny, and chain their widows in solitude to the dull remembrance of those tiresome days, they have passed in their company.

From these reflections I was roused by a messenger who came to invite me to the funeral of a distant relation, carried off by a fever in the prime of life, and second year of his marriage, and who I afterwards learned, had done me the honor of an appointment to be one of his executors. After the funeral rites, the executors met, with some other friends to inspect the will of the deceased, and see what directions he had given for the distribution of his property. He had by the same disease to which he himself fell a victim, lost his only child; and as

he had no brother, we found the greater part of his effects, bequeathed to a sister and her family. Only two rooms in the mansion house, as much land as would afford her the use of a cow, and £30 per annum, were allotted to his widow; and of this trifling provision, she was immediately to be deprived in case of another marriage. I was the more surprized at this arrangement, as I knew the deceased to have been a man of the most generous and delicate feelings. His widow too, a most amiable and deserving woman, had been the wife both of his choice and his youth; she had possessed his whole affection and confidence during life, and why he thought it necessary to lay such degrading restrictions upon her at his death, I could not easily conjecture. Upon mentioning the matter to the other executors and friends of the deceased, I found they all highly approved of his conduct, "It was surely better they said to bequeath his property to his sister's family who were his relations, than give it to a stranger." His widow was a young, lively woman, she would soon, they had no doubt, get the better of her grief and in the arms of another husband, lose all remembrance of the deceased. They were therefore *decidedly* of opinion, their late friend, acted a very prudent part in endeavouring to prevent her from becoming the wife of another: at all events, in putting it out of her power, to lavish any part of his property, upon the man who was to supplant him in her affections. To answer these arguments appeared to me of little importance, as the arrangement of the deceased, could not now be altered. Having therefore made the necessary preparation for discharging the trust reposed in me I returned home, resolving to lay an abstract of these two cases before the public :

hoping the absurd and ungrateful conduct of the two deceased individuals in question, will induce every husband who really loves his wife, to make his Will, whilst in his sober senses; and put it out of the power of the mania of old age, or the delirium of fever to lay such unnatural and degrading restrictions upon his widow.

Where a man is dying young, and leaving a blooming widow, the mother of several children, the possibility that a second husband, may tyrannically deprive them of their patrimony, renders it improper to leave her the unlimited mistress of all her husband's property. In such cases, it is undoubtedly necessary to secure the children, in the possession of whatever part of his property, the father may wish them to enjoy.

But, when there are no children, or where they are already provided for, it is difficult to see why a wife should not be considered the nearest heir, and left in possession of at least a considerable part of her husband's property; unlimited by any such degrading condition as permanent widowhood.

The common allegation, that a brother and sister's family are a man's *own relations*, whilst his widow is a stranger, is ridiculous in the extreme. What person can be so nearly related to a man, as she, for whom he had, in obedience to the strongest feelings of nature, forsaken both Father and Mother; and to whom, he had been united by the most endearing ties! With whom, he had made a common interest, who had possessed his unbounded confidence, and to retain, or protect whom, he would at one period have given up every other earthly possession. What person can be so entitled to his gratitude and generous regard, as she who has put her person, and property wholly into his possession; forsaken for him her family name, been the

echo of his joy, and the partner of his grief!—The husband's death it is true, dissolving the marriage, and leaving the widow at liberty to marry again, would seem to place her in the same situation with regard to her husband, as before her marriage, and therefore to render her a perfect stranger to him. But, is she not considered a relation by the law of the land, does she not continue to bear his name, and does she not, where there is real affection, mourn for him as for her nearest and dearest connection? Besides, does not gratitude and generosity, revolt at the idea of considering her a stranger, and ceasing to be interested in the happiness of one whom he had so lately valued above every other creature, and to whom he had been indebted for the most exquisite enjoyments of life? Is not the language of love “how shall I render happy the object of my affections, by what means shall I testify the sincerity of my affection, and raise myself in her esteem?” How then, can this affection come all at once to disregard the happiness, opinion or esteem of its object? Of what consequence is it to a dying man, if his wife be afterwards comfortable and respectable, what the means are, by which her happiness and respectability are accomplished, his anxiety, as far as she is concerned, should be I would think, wholly for her happiness. It is therefore, his business to do every thing in his power to make her happy, and if another marriage may be afterwards found necessary for this purpose, I can see no good reason why he should dislike the idea. Is he afraid that the “green-eyed monster” will follow him into the regions of the dead, and disturb his repose in the haunts of departed spirits? Or does he wish to convert his wife, into a monumental pillar, bearing his name, by way of

inscription, and perpetuating amongst posterity, the knowledge of his living importance? How ridiculous, how selfish, how degrading. Would husbands but pause, and examine impartially their motives, such restrictions upon their widows, could never find their way into their Testaments.

It may, perhaps, be alleged that where a widow is the mother of children, whose youth and education, require her superintendence and care, a second marriage, by calling her off from the discharge of that duty, might materially injure the children, and therefore upon this account, the arrangements in question are necessary. But not to mention that this does not apply in the numerous instances, where there are no children, or where their education is considerably advanced, such restrictions upon the widow, are even in this case degrading, unnatural, and unreasonable. They suppose a woman possessed of so little sense of propriety, or affection for her children, as if left to her own discretion, to sacrifice their interest to her own passions. What an idea to entertain at death, of that woman, who had possessed our unbounded confidence during life; and whose character for discretion and prudence we would have died to defend!—Second marriages are often as necessary to the comfort and happiness of either male or female as the first; and therefore such restrictions are extremely unnatural. Let a man but reverse the case, and put the question to himself, how he would feel were it in the power of his dying wife, to lay him under a similar restraint? Would he not feel the distrust degrading, would it not tend to destroy every feeling of affection for its author, and might it not in the course of less than two years be found exceedingly unpleasant? Besides such restrictions on the husband's part, are an attempt to

exercise an authority, which, he by no means possesses. The wife is bound to him during life, but at his death, every such bond is broken, and the union completely dissolved. He has therefore no right to attempt by his will to restrict her future conduct.

In all cases, therefore, the dictates of reason and justice, undoubtedly is, that a husband in his Testament provides for his wife with the same disinterested view to her happiness, that actuates his conduct towards one of his children. It may be, and is in many instances imprudent to leave much in the unlimited power of a child; and in such cases, the cautious parent will accompany his bequest, with necessary restrictions. A similar conduct may, no doubt be sometimes necessary, from a husband towards his widow. She may require the superintendence of a guardian or some limitation in the enjoyment of a legacy. But, as the consideration of a husband, "*a stranger*" obtaining absolute authority over the fortune of a daughter, never induces the parent to prohibit altogether her marriage; so neither ought the thought, that a second husband may participate in the after happiness of a widow, cause the first to make such arrangements at his death, as may prevent her from again marrying. A wife is a man's tenderest, and dearest relative; every thing, even in a remote degree connected with her happiness, must therefore be dear to him: and I am persuaded if sensible husbands would impartially consider the subject, they would, instead of lessening their legacies to prevent the after marriages of their widows, rejoice at the consideration of having it in their power to enable them to form advantageous, and respectable matrimonial connections. Such a thought, could we deliver ourselves from the tyranny

of prejudice and custom, must afford the most grateful solace to the heart wrung with anguish at leaving disconsolate, and unprotected the object of our fondest affections. Having made every arrangement in his power for filling up the breach his death is about to make, in the peace and happiness of her he loves, the dying husband, could safely commit her future felicity to the superintending providence of the Almighty, conscious of having done to her his duty, and freed from every anxiety respecting her, he may without distraction of mind, prepare for that kingdom, in which they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but, where he may one day hope again to meet her, and as the angels of God, enjoy for ever and ever those pure pleasures, that are to be found in the favour and immediate presence of the Almighty.

SHANESBOROUGH.

Reconnoitering-Hill, Dec. 11th 1811.

To the Proprietors of the Belfast Magazine.

REMARKS ON SOME POEMS ON THE
DEATH OF DR. PERCY, BISHOP OF
DROMORE.

——— "When the Doctor died,
Apollo whimper'd and the muses *cried*;
Parnassus mop'd for days, in business slack,
And like a hearse, the hill was hung in
black,

Minerva, sighing for her fav'rite son,
Pronounc'd, with lengthen'd face, *the world*
undone;

Her Owl too hooted in so loud a style,
That people might have heard the bird *a*
mile

Such were the *Heavenly howlings* for his
death,

As if dame nature had resign'd her breath."

PETER PINDAR.

I HAVE been very much amused in reading the various poems published in the Newspapers, on the death of the Bishop of Dromore. He was doubtless a good man,